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UNCLAS COLOMBO 000563

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

FOR SA/INS

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [CE](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 050 (03/30/04)

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

CONTENTS: CAMPAIGN NUGGETS
- CODEL DREIER

CAMPAIGN NUGGETS

[1](#)1. (SBU) FYI. Here are the latest nuggets of news:

-- As noted in Colombo 557, campaigning for the April 2 election is set to end at midnight tonight (March 30). The PM is speaking at a number of rallies before attending the UNP's final rally of the campaign in Colombo tonight. President Kumaratunga is also scheduled to attend at least one rally today. The TNA also has its final rally in Jaffna late today.

-- In a sudden move, the Election Commissioner took over state-run media late March 29 for the rest of the election timeframe. He is taking the action to ensure that the media is on the up-and-up and neutral from now on until April 2. As you know, state-run media had been in the hands of President Kumaratunga and has been skewing things in the UPFA's favor.

-- Killing of Tamil Candidate: A TNA candidate for Parliament was shot and killed in Batticaloa town late March 29. His assistant was also reportedly killed. No one has been arrested in the crime. For the reasons reviewed in Colombo 557 regarding recent shootings, the LTTE is suspected of carrying out the killing (the TNA candidate was reportedly pro-Karuna). This is the fourth killing this campaign (fifth if the report re the assistant is accurate), three of them have been linked to the Tigers.

-- Earlier today, DCM, RSO, and Pol briefed Mission's ten teams (officers and FSNs) going out for informal election observation later this week. PAFFREL (the local USAID-funded election monitoring NGO) and NDI also briefed the teams. The teams are going all over (Jaffna, Vavuniya, Galle, Hambantota, Nuwara Eliya, Anuradhapura, etc.). The OTI offices in Trincomalee and Ampara will also be calling in information on what is happening in the always-volatile east on election day. (POL)

CODEL DREIER

[1](#)2. (U) You will see an e-mail with attachments that we are sending out to Col. Shupp, Codel Dreier's coordinator, today. We would appreciate it if you would call him to make sure that he has it. (His numbers are: office: 202-225-7807 or cell 703-244-1928.) The e-mail and attachments should also be shared with someone on Dreier's staff as well (by either the desk or H). One key point: Mission is requesting clearance for the Codel aircraft to use Ratmalana military airport (instead of Bandanaraike international airport), which is closer to Colombo and also a much easier place to handle military aircraft (all our milair comes into Ratmalana, most recently 13th Air Force commander MG Larsen). The flight crew apparently is concerned that Ratmalana isn't "all weather," which is technically true but not significant (Mission personnel have landed at Ratmalana, from where commercial flights to Jaffna are also staged, in all kinds of weather.) We would appreciate it if you would emphasize our points and that our judgment should be trusted on this. Thanks. (POL)

LUNSTEAD